

## June 28, 2005- Rahall Fights for Veterans Funding

### RAHALL FIGHTS FOR VETERANS FUNDING DESPITE LATE SHORTFALL ANNOUNCEMENT AND RULES COMMITTEE SETBACK

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV), joined by many of his colleagues, urged President Bush to help the Veterans Affairs Department with their recently announced budget shortfall. "This should not be a controversy; it is common sense to fix this budget shortfall," said Rahall. "Our veterans health care funding is at least \$1 billion short, we have an obligation to ensure those funds are available and I am urging the President to request a supplemental funding bill."

The funding shortfall of at least \$1 billion was released recently by Veterans Affairs Secretary Jim Nicholson, a month after the House of Representatives passed the 2006 spending bill. Nicholson and other VA officials will be on Capitol Hill this week to discuss the circumstances around the budget shortfall. Rahall and many of his colleagues are focusing efforts on ensuring the VA receives a boost to their funding for 2006.

"We have a responsibility to ensure the money is available for these crucial veterans programs," said Rahall. "Our veterans are the heart and soul of this Nation, they have fought to protect our Nation in times of war and times of peace and we must protect them today to ensure funding is available for crucial programs, including health care."

Rahall and his colleagues fighting for veterans' health care suffered a setback late Monday evening when Republicans on the Rules Committee voted against taking care of the budget shortfall. The Republican members opposed giving Congressman Chet Edwards (D-TX) the ability to open up debate and quickly pass his amendment to fix the VA budget shortfall this week. All Democrats on the Committee supported Rep. Edwards's amendment.

"The Rules Committee is playing partisan politics with our veterans and it is downright disgraceful," said Rahall. "Every one of the Republicans who voted down party lines to reject the opportunity to fix the VA budget has veterans in their district. And they should be ashamed of their failure to support our veterans."

The Administration's original budget proposal for the Veterans Affairs Department called for a less than inflation increase for veterans' health care, and also proposed higher co-payments for prescription drugs and VA medical system enrollment fees. Rahall and his colleagues worked to increase funding then, and now will continue to work to increase the VA budget since this additional shortfall has come to light.

Rahall noted that he is poised to continue this fight through every avenue possible to ensure that in the end, the VA receives the additional funding needed to fix the shortfall. Rahall concluded, "I am hopeful that the folks across the aisle will set partisan politics aside and work with me and my fellow Democrats to ensure our veterans' services are fully funded."

Please find a press release below from U.S. Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY), ranking Democrat on the Rules Committee, regarding the recent action of the committee.

Representative Louise M. Slaughter

Ranking Member, House Committee on Rules

Representing New York's 28th District

## PRESS RELEASE

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Rules Committee Republicans Oppose Health Care for Vets

Vote against funding to fill billion dollar shortfall in Health Care for Vets

Washington, DC - Late Monday evening Rules Committee Chairman David Dreier (R-CA) along with Reps. Hastings (R-WA), Capito (R-WV), Cole (R-OK), Bishop (R-UT) and Gingrey (R-GA) voted against taking care of a budget shortfall the Bush Administration recently announced has opened up in our country's veterans' health care system.

"It just doesn't make any sense," said Rep. Louise M. Slaughter, the Ranking Democrat on the House Rules Committee. She continued, "Of all the places to pinch pennies, the health care our veterans rely on shouldn't be one of them. We have a patriotic duty to ensure our veterans are taken care of with the utmost respect."

Last week, the Bush Administration acknowledged that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) needs an additional one billion dollars this year to cover the health care needs of our country's veterans, including approximately 86,000 veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Every major veteran's groups, including the American Legion, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Disabled American Veterans, condemned this billion-dollar shortfall and predicted it could seriously harm the quality and availability of veterans' health care.

In response to the announced shortfall, Texas Congressman Chet Edwards, the top Democratic Member on the House

Subcommittee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs, offered an amendment to immediately address this shortfall, so no veteran would lose access to their much needed health care. Invoking a special budget wartime authority, Edwards proposed adding the money to H.R. 3057, the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill that Congress will be passing later this week.

Unfortunately, Chairman Dreier (R-CA) & Reps. Hastings (R-WA), Capito (R-WV), Cole (R-OK), Bishop (R-UT) and Gingrey (R-GA) opposed giving Congressman Edwards the procedural waiver his amendment needed to be debated and quickly passed this week. In the Rules Committee Monday night, Republican members voted along party lines to block the Edwards Amendment and prevent the House from having the opportunity to consider it.

"Standing up for our veterans is not a Democratic or a Republican issue, its an American issue," said Rep. Slaughter. She concluded, "It's about keeping the solemn promise we make to the men and women who go to war to defend our freedoms. We promise we'll take care of them if they come home wounded...It is unconscionable to me that we would ever go back on that promise while our country is at war."

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